

Toras



Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

The Scroll of Ruth contains one of the most idyllic stories in the Bible, a tale of "autumnal love" between a widow (Ruth) and a widower (Boaz), within the backdrop of diaspora inter-marriage, conversion to Judaism, and the agricultural life in ancient Israel. The Rabbinic Sages ordained that we read this Scroll on Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks, the anniversary of the Torah Revelation at Sinai and the celebration of the first fruits brought to the Temple in Jerusalem. And since Shavuot is the climatic zenith of Passover, the development of a newly-freed group of slaves in the Sinai desert into a Torah-imbued nation firmly ensconced in their own homeland of Israel, the reasons for this special reading are many: Boaz and Ruth are the great-grandparents of David, the Psalm-singing military hero who united the tribes of Israel and first envisioned the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, Ruth the Moabite is Jew-by-choice whose commitment to Torah Judaism makes her worthy of being the great grandmother of the prototype of the eventual Messiah-King, and the last three chapters of the story takes place between the beginning of the barley harvest (just before Passover) and the very end of the wheat harvest (not long after Shavuot). I would wish to ask three questions on the Scroll of Ruth, the answer to which I believe will provide an extra dimension of our understanding as to why we read this particular Scroll on Shavuot, the festival which serves as harbinger to redemption.

Firstly, from a narrative perspective: the first chapter spans the ten years the family of Naomi is in Moab, and the last three chapters describe the happenings of the three month period between the barley and wheat harvests. Why did the author give so much text space to such a small span of times?

Secondly, the midrash (Ruth Rabbah) tells us that Ruth and Naomi arrive in Bethlehem at the precise time of the funeral of Boaz's wife, and that Boaz died immediately after he impregnated Ruth; that is how the Rabbinic Sages account for the fact that Boaz is not mentioned in the last verses of the Scroll (Ruth 4:14-22), which specifically deal with the birth of Oved, son to Boaz and Ruth as well as father to Jesse. Why do the Sages see fit to sandwich these joyous verses recounting such a significant love story between two seemingly tragic deaths—without the text itself

mentioning those deaths explicitly or even hinting at a mournful mood? And finally, can we possibly glean from between the lines of the Scroll what precisely occurred between Boaz and Ruth during the night they spent together on the threshing floor. What did her mother-in-law Naomi suggest that she do—and what did she do in actuality?

If Shavuot is truly the Festival of Redemption—and redemption links humanity to the Eternal G-d of all eternity—the period which is eternally Sabbath—then the Scroll of Ruth must deal with the eternal rather than the temporal. Israel is the eternal homeland of the Jewish people—and any diaspora experience can only be temporal at best and destructive at worst. The first chapter opens with a famine in Israel, and an important personage (Elimelekh) who leaves Bethlehem (literally the house of bread) with his wife and sons to seek "greener pastures" in the idolatrous Moab. As happened with Father Abraham, Diaspora proved far more dangerous (Genesis 12:10-20), the two sons, Mahlon (lit. sickness) and Kilion (lit. destruction) marry Hittite wives—and since the children follow the religion of the mother, the Israelite line of Elimelekh and Naomi—seems to have ended! The father and his sons all die in Moab—their earlier spiritual demise expressing itself physically; fortunately one daughter-in-law clings to her mother-in-law Naomi, converts to Judaism ("Where you will go"—to Israel—"there shall I go, where you will lodge, there shall I lodge,"—maintaining the same sexual purity as you—"Your people shall be my people, your G-d my G-d"—Ruth 1:16), and returns to Bethlehem. Only now—in Israel—can eternal history begin, and so the next three chapters, and the next three months, are far more significant than the previous ten years, which had almost destroyed the family line.

The midrash tells us that Boaz's wife has died just as Naomi and Ruth return—and that Boaz will die three months later. But death in itself is not tragic for Judaism: after all, every individual must die sooner or later. The only relevant question is to what extent the individual, when alive, participates in Jewish eternity. Naomi sends Ruth to glean the forgotten grain and harvest the produce in the corner of the field—agricultural provision which the Torah provides for the poor Israelites. Divine Providence sent Ruth to Boaz's field—and Boaz was a Kinsman of Elimelekh. Boaz seems to be attracted to this comely proselyte—stranger and gives her his protection. Naomi understands that participation in Jewish eternity means

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having a child with Jewish parentage in Israel; she therefore instructs Ruth to wash and anoint herself, dress in special finery, visit the place on the threshing floor where Boaz will be spending the night at the height of the harvest season, and lie down at his feet. She also warns Ruth not to reveal who she is (Ruth 3:3,4). In effect, she is suggesting that Ruth tempt Boaz as Tamar had tempted Boaz's forbear Judah generations earlier—and at least enter Jewish history by bearing his child (see Genesis, chapter 38).

Ruth senses that Boaz loves her—and so she holds out for higher stakes than a mere "one night stand." She tells him exactly who she is, and she asks that he "redeem" her by marriage and by restoring to her Elimelech's previously sold homestead in Israel. Ruth understands that true eternity means bearing a child on your own piece of land in Israel—not in the sly, but as a respected wife and householder. Boaz complies, and Oved, the grandfather of King David, is born. Ruth's commitment to Torah—the land of Torah, the laws of Torah, the loving-kindness of Torah, the modesty of Torah—catapults this convert into the center stage of Jewish eternity. Indeed, there is no book more fitting for the Festival of The First Fruits, Torah and Redemption than the Scroll of Ruth. © 2004 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

The Torah, in this week's portion, alludes to the redemption of the first born son. (Numbers 3:40-51) Originally, the eldest son in each family was designated to serve in the Temple. After the eldest in the family faltered by participating in the sin of the golden calf, the Temple work was transferred to the tribe of Levi, which was not involved in the sin. The Torah required the redeeming of each first born at that time for five coins. One wonders why, if the redemption

already took place, it is repeated for every first born son to this day.

In Egypt, the first born functioned as priests. In this way, every Egyptian family was connected to the Egyptian religion. Appropriately, it was the Egyptian first born who was killed in Egypt as they were the religious visionaries and therefore most responsible for enslaving the Jews. Once they were killed, and the Jewish first born were saved, they, too, were designated to dedicate their lives to religious service. (Exodus 13:15) This was done, not only in recognition of having miraculously escaped the slaying of the Egyptian first born, but also as a means of binding each Jewish family to the Holy Temple.

From this perspective, it can be suggested that the ceremony that we have today of redeeming the first born (pidyon haben) is meant as an educational tool-to remind families that there was a time when one of their own was connected directly to the Temple service. Such a reminder, it is hoped, would result in a commitment by the entire family, to a life of spirituality and religious commitment.

During the pidyon haben ceremony, the Kohen (Jewish Priest) asks the parents of the child if they prefer to keep the child or to pay for the redemption, with the assumption that the parents will pay for the redemption. As a Kohen, I always wondered what would occur if the father decided to keep the money rather than take his child. Interestingly, Jewish Law insists that regardless of the response, the child remains with his family. If the end result is the same, why is this question asked in the first place?

When the Kohen asks, "What do you prefer, the money or the child?" what he is really asking is, "what is your value system? Is it solely based on money, or does it have at its core, the essence, the soul of the child?" The Kohen has the responsibility to challenge the parent with such a question. With the response to this rhetorical question, the family reaffirms that spiritual values are the highest priority in raising a child.

Note that if one of the child's grandfathers is a Kohen or Levi, he is not redeemed. This is because, even in contemporary times, the pidyon haben reminder is not necessary for there are roles unique to his family's religious life which serve as an aid in remembering the priorities of a spiritual quest.

So, the next time we go to a pidyon haben, we should not rush through it. We should realize what is happening. We should recognize that through their words, a family is making a commitment to live the Torah and walk with God throughout their days. © 2004 *Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA*

RABBI DOV KRAMER

Taking a Closer Look

“And you shall take the Levi'im for me, I am G-d, in place of all firstborn of the Children of

Israel; and the animals of the Levi'im in place of all firstborn of the animals of the Children of Israel." (Bamidbar 3:41, and similarly in 3:45) Originally, the firstborn were the spiritual leaders of the nation. However, after failing to take a leadership role when it came to rectifying the sin of the "golden calf," this leadership was transferred to the Tribe of Levi. The actual transfer is described in our Parsha, with a member of the Tribe of Levi taking the place of a corresponding firstborn- and the additional firstborn (as there were 273 more non-Levite firstborn than non-firstborn Levites) giving five shekalim (which went to Aharon) to transfer or "redeem" their original "kedusha" (status of holiness).

But there was another "transfer" of kedusha going on at the same time. Firstborn animals (or at least some of them) also have a status of holiness that prevents them from being used like other animals. Kosher (non-wild) animals must be given to the Kohain (unless it has a blemish disqualifying it from being brought as an offering), while firstborn donkeys must be redeemed- their status transferred onto either a goat or sheep. However, instead of the (non-Levite) owner of the donkey transferring it onto his own (kosher) animal before giving it to the Kohain, Moshe was told that they would be transferred onto an animal belonging to a Levi (see Rashi).

The transfer of the leadership from the firstborn to the Levi'im seems rather straightforward; the firstborn were deemed no longer fit to lead, so it was taken away from them and given to the Levi'im. The purpose of the other transfer, though- from the firstborn donkeys to the goats and sheep that belonged to the Levi'im- is rather unclear. It's not as if there were no other way to redeem the donkeys- they could have been redeemed just as every firstborn donkey would be from then on, i.e. via the donkey owner's own goat (or sheep). Why did G-d have the redemption process (temporarily) altered so that the Levi had to have his animal take on the "kedusha" of a firstborn and then be given to a Kohain? What was accomplished by having the Levi give up his animal instead of the donkey owner giving up his? And why was this included as part of the process whereby the kedusha of the firstborn men was transferred onto the Levi'im?

The Talmud (Bechoros 5b) explains why the donkey (as opposed to horses or camels, etc.) is the only non-kosher animal that requires the redemption of its firstborn: "because they helped [the Children of] Israel at the time they went out of Egypt, as there was no individual from [the Children of] Israel that didn't have with him 90 top-rate donkeys carrying silver and gold from Egypt." It obviously wasn't this newborn, about-to-be-redeemed donkey that helped us when we left Egypt- nor its mother. We therefore can't call this special status of donkeys a "reward" for the "favor" they did for us. (Besides, animals have no free will, so they didn't "choose" to help us.) Rather, it is a means of

teaching us, and instilling within us, the character trait of "hakaras hatov," acknowledging and expressing gratitude for something we benefited from. When we redeem the "kedusha" of a firstborn donkey onto a kosher animal, we should acknowledge the help that the species has been to us. Hopefully this will train us to be thankful for, and to, all that we benefit from.

Up until this point, the firstborn were the leaders of the nation. They may have failed in their role as leaders by the "golden calf," but they were the leaders nonetheless. When the nation entered the covenant at Sinai, one of the prerequisites was to bring offerings to G-d (see Rambam, Laws of Forbidden Relationships 13:1-3)- and it was the firstborn that brought these offerings for the nation. Now that the time had come for the leadership to be transferred to the Tribe that stepped forward when the firstborn should have and didn't, there was a danger that they would just be pushed aside. The positive aspects of their leadership may have been forgotten or overlooked, disregarded with the "changing of the guard." Perhaps this is why G-d told the Levi'im to be the ones to redeem the nation's firstborn donkeys- to remind them that they still must show "hakaras hatov" towards the "outgoing" firstborn, and for what they had done. Their accomplishments (including being the vehicles through which the covenant with G-d was enacted) are not nullified by the need for a leadership change.

This may be the message G-d was sending to them, the Levi'im, and the entire nation by incorporating the redemption of the firstborn donkeys with the redemption of the firstborn men. © 2004 Rabbi D. Kramer

DR. AVIGDOR BONCHEK

What's Bothering Rashi

The Book of Bamidbar (Numbers) begins with God's command to Moses to count the Children of Israel. Each of the Twelve Tribes had a leader—Prince—who would be in charge of the census of his tribe. After the names of these princes are enumerated, we find the following sentence:

"And Moses and Aaron took these men who were designated by name." (Numbers 1:17)

"These men"—Rashi: These twelve princes."

"Who were designated"—Rashi: Here, by [their] names."

These Rashi comments have puzzled all the commentators. What has he added, they ask, to our understanding of the verse by his comments? What he says, we already know from the verse itself. Certainly Rashi wouldn't waste ink to repeat in his own words what the Torah itself tells us. Can you think of an answer that explains the necessity of these comments?

If you don't have an answer yet, let me show you what some of the major commentators suggest as the reason for Rashi's comments.

The Mizrahi (the most famous of Rashi commentators) says: "The verse ordinarily should have used a pronoun and said 'And Moses and Aaron took THEM...' But since it went out of its way to elaborate and say 'these men who were designated by name' we might have mistakenly thought that these were some other men than those mentioned in the previous list. Therefore Rashi comes to set us straight; he tells us that in fact these are the very same men referred to above."

But this answer is problematic. Why would you say it is problematic?

A Problem: First of all, maybe they are different men! How does Rashi know they are not? Rashi's sole source of information is the words of the Torah unless he cites a Midrash. Here he doesn't cite a Midrash, so he knows what he knows from the Torah itself. How does he know that these are not different men? And if we insist that they are the same men, then why did the Torah use all these extra words?! They tell us nothing more than the single word "them" would have told us. This question seriously weakens the validity of the Mizrahi's answer.

The Gur Aryeh (this is the Maharal of Prague) offers his answer: The words "these men" makes them sound like ordinary men. But they were of a higher stature, they were princes. Therefore Rashi changes the wording by saying "these twelve PRINCES."

But there're are problems with this answer as well. What?

Some Problems: Again we ask: So why did the Torah refer them as "men" and not as princes, as the Maharal thinks they should be called? It wouldn't make sense to think that Rashi knows better than the Torah itself!

Another problem is that Rashi himself says (Numbers 13:3), when the Torah calls the spies "anashim" ("men"), that the term "anashim" always means important people, not ordinary people. And here the Torah refers to these men as "anashim."

So the Gur Aryeh's answer is twice weakened!

Another early commentator, the Mesiach Illimim, offers the following strange answer: Since the names of the princes include the father's name, like Nachshon son of Aminadav, I might have thought these are two different people (Nachshon AND Aminadav) and that there were in fact 24 (!) men. Therefore, Rashi's comment is meant to straighten us out by saying "these TWELVE princes."

The problem here should be obvious: No one would ever make such a mistake. Therefore Rashi does not need to tell us there are only 12 and not 24 men here, I understand that on my own.

Why then does Rashi make this comment? This is a real brainteaser. Can you think of an answer? Hint: See Rashi on Exodus 28:10.

The previous time, before this verse, where the Torah refers to the princes of the tribes is in Exodus

35:27 There it says that the princes brought the stones for the ephod and the choshen mishpat (the High Priest's breastplate). In them were inscribed the names of the twelve tribes.

We gave a hint above to look at Rashi's comment on Exodus 28:10. There Rashi tells us who the twelve tribes were whose names were inscribed in the stones in the High Priest's ephod. He names them. Did you notice a difference between those twelve tribes and the twelve tribes listed here?

Of course you did. (Right?) On the stones of the ephod the tribe of Levi was included while the tribes of Ephraim and Menashe were excluded. We can reasonably assume that the princes who brought these stones were the princes of these twelve tribes. So, it turns out that the twelve princes enumerated here in Bamidbar were not the same princes referred to earlier. That is Rashi's point. He is stressing that these men, THESE PRINCES, and not those princes in Exodus. Therefore the Torah does not say just "Moses...took them" as we would have expected, but it rather states explicitly "These men who were designated by name." Because these princes are designated by name while those in Exodus were never designated by name (Rashi just tells which tribes they came from). The Torah itself here (not just Rashi) stresses "These men" because this is the first time that Menashe and Ephraim take their place among the twelve tribes. This necessarily must push one tribe out (because there can only be a total of twelve tribes). Levi is the tribe excluded as the Torah itself stresses and repeats three different times in this chapter. See 1:47: "But the Levites...were not numbered among them." Again in verse 1:49; and again in verse 2:33.

We now understand why the Torah stressed that Moses and Aaron took "These men" because these men were never before considered princes. And these twelve tribes (which included Menashe and Ephraim and excluded Levi) were never before considered the twelve tribes.

And this is what Rashi is clarifying for us. This I believe is the point of Rashi's enigmatic comment.

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RABBI NOSSON CHAYIM LEFF

Sfas Emes

by Rabbi JB Love

Let's work with the last paragraph on the first page of the Bemidbar Sfas Emes, That paragraph begins: "R. Meir omeir: 'Kohl ha'oseik baTorah lishma...' " (ArtScroll: "Whoever engages in Torah study for its own sake...").

What, exactly, is "Torah lishma?" ArtScroll's translation, just quoted, is the mainline pshat. But we should be aware that great debates have swirled around this question. Thus, for example, a major theme of R.

Chayim Volozhiner's sefer *Nefesh Hachayim* is clarifying what is "Torah lishma" (and what is not!)

The Sfas Emes begins with a definition that looks simple. "Torah lishma", says the Sfas Emes, is exactly what its sheim (name) indicates. The word "Torah" means instruction. Hence, "Torah lishma" means learning to provide instruction; that is, learning in order to know how to live one's life.

Note how far we have come from the mainline psbat of "Torah for its own sake". And the Sfas Emes immediately adds new ingredients making for a much richer dish. He quickly dispels any notion that intellectuality per se is part of the story. On the contrary, as the Sfas Emes told us last week (Bechukosai, 5632), our objective in learning Torah should not be "lei'da"—to acquire knowledge—and/or "le'hasig"—to make intellectual achievements. Rather, our goal in learning Torah should be to subordinate our personal intellect, so that we can know and follow *retzon HaShem* (the will of HaShem).

(It would be a mistake to conclude from the preceding sentences that the Sfas Emes was anti-intellectual. He was so involved in intellectual activity that he completed his *chidushim* on *Shas* before he was 25 years old. And thereafter, when he became *Gerrer Rebbe*, his *ma'amarim* always conveyed deep thought.)

The Sfas Emes moves on now to another topic. This parsha—and the Sefer that it begins—are called: "Bemidbar"; that is, "in the desert". Accordingly, the Sfas Emes focuses on the meaning of the key word: "midbar"—to see what additional information it may contain. First, he alludes to two *Medrashim* in *Medrash Rabba* which work with the word "midbar". These *Medrashim* resonate with the word "midbar" in other contexts. Conceivably, they may provide additional information on the word "midbar" in the present context.

One *Medrash* (*Medrash Rabba*, Bemidbar, 1:7) tells us that to progress in the study of Torah, a person must de-emphasize his ego. That is, he must consider himself "hefkair"—accessible to all claimants—like the midbar, the desert. A second *Medrash* (in *Medrash Rabba*, 1:2) cites the midbar as the place where *Bnei Yisroel* welcomed HaShem's Presence.

The Sfas Emes then gives us his own non-psbat on "midbar." We know the *shoresh* (root) *DBR* in *leshon hakodesh* means "to speak". The Sfas Emes points to another meaning of that root: namely, "to lead". So far, the Sfas Emes is on solid, non-controversial etymological ground. He then proceeds to more allusive territory. If *DBR* means "to lead", he finds it plausible to read *MDBR* as an Aramaic passive form; i.e., "to be led".

Thus, *Bnei Yisroel* in the midbar on their way to *Eretz Yisroel* conducted themselves as people who had given themselves over totally to HaShem's leadership. Similarly we, in traversing segments of our lives that may resemble a midbar, should try to live in accordance with HaShem's will. This perspective follows directly

from the Sfas Emes's reading of "midbar" as "being led."

The Sfas Emes offers us a simile, from *Yeshayahu* (10, 15) to help us achieve this new self-image. He suggests that we view ourselves "ka'garzen be'yad he'chotzev" ("as the axe in the hand of the wood-cutter"). This simile should sound familiar. We encounter it in one of the *piyutim* on the night of *Kol Nidrei*. There is a great paradox/challenge here. For this subordination of our will to *retzon HaShem* itself requires a strong act of volition on our part.

The Sfas Emes concludes this paragraph of his text by calling up another *pasuk* in *Yeshayahu* (43:7): "Kohl ha'nikra bi'shemi ve'lichvodi berasiv". ("Everyone who is called by My Name and whom I have created for My glory...") But wait! The *pasuk* just quoted contains the word "shemi". That word rings a bell. Earlier in this *ma'amar*, we saw a word from the same root (*sheim*), when the Sfas Emes was discussing "Torah li'shma."

So, with his artful crafting of the *ma'amar*, the Sfas Emes is telling us his concluding thoughts on this subject. "Torah Li'shma", says the Sfas Emes, means: that we live our lives in a way that redounds to HaShem's glory!

MACHON ZOMET

Shabbat B'Shabbato

by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

In the beginning of the Torah portion of *Bamidbar*, a list is given of the leaders of the tribes who will assist Moshe in taking a census of *Bnei Yisrael* (1:5-15). Levi, who will be counted separately, is replaced by *Yosef's* two sons, *Menasheh* and *Efraim*, thus maintaining the total of twelve tribes. The leaders are listed in a logical sequence: The first ones to appear are *Leah's* sons, in order (*Reuven*, *Shimon*, *Yehuda*, *Yissachar*, *Zevulun*), followed by *Rachel's* sons (*Efraim*, *Menasheh*, *Binyamin*), and finally the sons of the maidservants (*Dan*, *Asher*, *Gad*, *Naftali*). However, in the actual census (1:20-43), the sequence appears differently; the list of *Leah's* son is interrupted by *Gad*, who appears after *Reuven* and *Shimon*, before *Yehuda*, *Yissachar*, and *Zevulun*. What is the reason for this break in the sequence?

A partial answer to this question can be seen in Chapter 2, where it is seen that the twelve tribes are divided into four groups (by "banners"), and that each group has one leader and two others. The list during the census itself is in the sequence of the banners. *Reuven*, *Shimon*, and *Gad* make up one group, and the others are: *Yehuda*, *Yissachar*, *Zevulun*; *Efraim*, *Menasheh*, *Binyamin*; and *Dan*, *Asher*, *Naftali*. The last two groups are straightforward—one consisting of the sons of *Rachel* and the other the sons of the maidservants. However, what is the reason for dividing *Leah's* sons into two groups, and placing *Gad*, the son of *Bilhah*, together with them?

It seems that there would have been a problem to follow the exact sequence of birth of the sons, because this would have given a group with Reuven, Shimon, and Yehuda under the same banner. In that case, one of the two most important tribes—Reuven or Yehuda—would not be a leader in its own right. However, in order to divide Leah's sons into two separate groups, one led by Reuven and the other led by Yehuda, it was necessary to add another tribe, in order to maintain the basic structure of three tribes for each banner. Thus, the only remaining question would be: Which tribe should be included with Leah's children?

Clearly, there would be no point in moving out one of the members of the third group, since it already consisted of Rachel's "three" sons—Efraim, Menasheh, and Binyamin. Thus, the real question becomes which one of the four sons of the maidservants should be transferred to Reuven's group. It was best to leave Dan in the fourth group, in order to lead it, since he was the oldest of these sons, so the choice was narrowed down to one of the remaining three -- Gad, Asher, or Naftali. Since Gad was the firstborn of Bilhah, this tribe was chosen to join the group of Reuven, who was Leah's firstborn.

This choice had historic consequences. The tribe of Gad linked its fate to that of the group led under the banner of Reuven. The two tribes grew large flocks of sheep (Bamidbar 32); together, they turned to Moshe to receive a heritage on the far side of the Jordan River; together, they led the way for the nation in crossing the river, as they had promised Moshe, in the war for the conquest of the land (Yehoshua 4, 12). And together, these two tribes returned to their heritage at the end of the war, and convinced the other tribes of the depth of their faith in the Almighty (Yehoshua 22).

Torah and Eretz Yisrael

by Rabbi Mordechai Greenberg, Rosh Yeshiva, Kerem B'Yavneh

"And G-d spoke to Moshe in the Sinai Desert [Bamidbar 1:1] -- Anybody who does not make himself completely free of any attachment, as a desert, is not capable of acquiring wisdom and the Torah. Therefore, it is written, 'in the Sinai Desert'" [Bamidbar Rabba 1:7].

Both the Torah and Eretz Yisrael are called a "heritage"—"I will give [the land] to you as a heritage" [Shemot 6:8]; "Moshe commanded the Torah to us, a heritage for the community of Yaacov" [Devarim 33:4]. On the other hand, we have been taught, "Prepare yourself for the study of Torah, which is not a heritage for you" [Avot 2:17]. Is this true, that it is not a heritage? Doesn't this contradict the explicit verse from Devarim?

The Talmud Yerushalmi gives an answer to this question. "Rabbi Hoshaya said, Every place where the word 'morasha' (heritage) is used, a doubt is implied" [Bava Batra 8:2]. The Talmud asks, "But isn't it written, 'a heritage for the community of Yaacov'?" The answer

is that when a man begins to study, his Torah is still weak and might be in doubt. Only after he expends a large effort does he have the privilege of acquiring the Torah as his own. The Torah is a heritage from the point of view of the one who gives it, in that the Almighty has refused to give it to anybody else. But the one receiving it must work hard in order to take possession of it.

Taking into account the point of view of the Almighty, Eretz Yisrael and the Torah can never belong to anybody else. However, from the point of Bnei Yisrael, they can only be acquired through an effort and through suffering. Both of these are listed among what can only be possessed through suffering (Berachot 5a). And these two things are linked to each other. There is no real Torah without the land, as is written by the Ramban—"The main principle of the mitzvot is relevant for those who dwell within Eretz Yisrael." On the other hand, there can be no land without Torah. Therefore, as soon as Bnei Yisrael start out on their journey to the land, when Moshe says, "We are on our way to the place that G-d has commanded" [Bamidbar 10:29], the first thing that begins to move is the Holy Ark: "And it happened, when the Ark began to move" [Bamidbar 10:35]. The same is also true in the beginning of the book of Yehoshua. "Be strong and courageous, for you will help this nation inherit the land... Just take great strength and courage, to observe and to maintain this entire Torah... This Torah scroll shall never leave your mouth" [Yehoshua 1:6-8]. When Bnei Yisrael crossed the Jordan, the Ark was in the lead, and all the tribes followed.

Just as the movement of the Ark symbolizes the entry into the land, so putting the Ark in storage is a sign of exile. Before the Kohanim went into exile, Yoshiyahu said to them, "You have no burden on your shoulders" [II Divrei Hayamim 35:3], and the sages explained that he told them to hide the Ark. (Yoma 52b). Thus, "when Bnei Yisrael have been expelled from their proper place, there can be no greater desecration of the Torah" [Chagiga 5b]. Recent years have taught us that the land has not yet achieved the status of a heritage. The more we delve into the study of Torah, the closer we will be to gaining possession of both the land and the Torah as a heritage.

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In counting the Jewish people, which is the focus of this week's parsha, the Torah details the names of the heads of the tribes of Israel who were to administer the count together with Moshe. The importance of knowing their names is a matter of puzzlement to many of the commentators to the Bible. After all, the Torah which is so sparing of words in so many cases and in its instructions of observance of ritual and mitzvot, spends a great deal of its space to

inform us of the names of these heads of the tribes of Israel. What is especially surprising regarding this matter is that none of these leaders apparently played a further role in Jewish history. They were all part of that generation of Jews who died in the desert and never entered the Land of Israel. So why do they merit to be mentioned in the Torah in such detail?

I feel that the Torah teaches us an important lesson in this instance, as to Jewish leadership and its responsibilities. Leaders are to be held personally responsible for failures in leadership. If the Torah had not told us the names of the leaders of the tribes of Israel, those who failed to rally their constituents to belief and courage and thus doomed them to die in the desert, then we would assess the blame for this sad result on historical or social causes, anonymous villains or perhaps just bad luck. But, as the Torah names the leaders of the tribes, it makes them personally (and eternally) responsible for their failure. This is a harsh and unforgiving lesson, but it is one of truth and clear vision. The mantle of official leadership in Jewish life is a very heavy one. The responsibilities are great and the danger of serious error abounds. Leaders must be aware of this when they assume positions of influence in Jewish life. Their names are recorded and they will be judged for good or for better based upon the results, even those unintended, of their decisions and behavior.

Judaism preaches and teaches that history is shaped by the actions of humans. The Marxist doctrine of history, shaped and governed by irresistible and omnipotent social and economic forces unaffected by the decisions and behavior of individual people, is the antithesis of Jewish tradition. People make history and shape events, and again for good or for better. One cannot escape personal responsibility by placing the blame for what goes wrong on outside forces, fate or chance. Judaism is the faith of personal responsibility. This is true not only in leadership roles but in everyone's personal life as well. All of our names are recorded next to our decisions and actions. Personal responsibility is the watchword of Jewish faith and life. © 2004 Rabbi Berel Wein- Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at www.rabbiwein.com. For more information on these and other products visit www.rabbiwein.com/jewishhistory.

RABBI EFRAIM LEVINE

Hadrash Ve-Haiyun Dor Revi'i

Aaron and his sons shall come when the camp journeys and they shall take down the partition of the screen and cover the Ark of Testimony with it. They shall place upon it a tachash hide covering and spread a cloth entirely of techailes over it and set its staves (Bamidbar 4:5, 6).

In this weeks parsha we learn that as the Holy Ark journeyed through the desert it was sheltered with three coverings. First, the paroches that divided between the Holy and the Holy of Holies was removed and placed on the aron. On top of this was placed the tachash hide and above this was laid a cloth of techailes. The commentators note that the order of the two upper layers was the opposite of the other utensils of the mishkan. Regarding them the posuk says that first they were covered with a techailes cloth and then a tachash hide. Why was the order of coverings different for the aron?

We may suggest that to an observer the techailes cloth evoked a feeling of awe. Chazal explain that the color of techailes is similar to the sea, the color of the sea is similar to the color of the heaven and the color of the heaven is similar to color of Hashem's throne. Thus, when one gazed at the techailes cloth he was reminded of Hashem's throne and was filled with a feeling of awe.

Chazal teach us that the tachash was a multi-colored wild animal that existed only during the generation of the Exodus. Its beautiful skin had six colors. The targum translates the word tachash as "sas'gona," which means "it rejoices over its beautiful colors." The Midrash (see Torah Sh'laima Shemos 48) tells us that just by looking at the tachash one's anxiety would dissipate. Its beauty evoked a feeling of joy. Indeed, the commentators explain that an alternate translation for the targum's word "sas'gona" is "it removed feelings of aggravation."

It is noteworthy that each utensils of the mishkan was covered with these two coverings, one evoked joy and the other fear. Indeed, chazal teach us that our approach to spirituality must be with both emotions as it says in the posuk. "rejoice with trepidation" (Tehillim 2,11).

However, there is a difference in how the coverings were layered. The commentators explain that the utensils of the mishkan are symbolic of the performance of various mitzvos. The outer covering of these utensils was tachash, the hide that evoked joy. When an onlooker gazed at the utensil he was filled with joy. Only after a closer examination would one discover the hidden layer of techailes beneath and experience awe. This is symbolic of our approach to mitzvos. When approaching a mitzvah one's initial emotion should be joy. Only after one performs the mitzvah and appreciates what the mitzvah represents will one attain a level of awe and fear of Hashem.

However with regard to the aron hakodesh it is the opposite. The aron hakodesh is symbolic of Torah study. Torah study is a delicate matter. One's initial approach to Torah study must be with awe and respect for the truth of the Torah and the Torah sages. Indeed in pirkei avos (6:6) where the mishna lists the forty eight steps necessary to acquire Torah first comes fear and later joy. Only with a mindset of awe will one succeed in

mastering Torah knowledge and uncover the joy of Torah. © 2003 Rabbi E. Levine

RABBI MORDECAI KAMENETZKY

Numbers Game

The Book of Numbers begins with—of course—numbers. In fact, it begins with many numbers! Moshe is told by Hashem to "Count the entire assembly of the Children of Israel.. by number of the names, every male according to their headcount." (Numbers 1:3) but no apparent reason is offered. There was no road infrastructure that had to be built, they were in a desert. There was no housing development plan that had to be assessed, they lived in sukkos. And there was no need to calculate agricultural concerns, food was sent from Heaven. So why did Hashem want them counted?

And the recorded numbers seem to have no bearing on any moral issue that is necessary for us as Twentieth Century Jews. Does it truly matter that the tribe of Gad had 45,650 males over twenty or or that the tribe of Menashe had 32,200? And the customary Haftorah for this week tells us that "the number of the Children of Israel will be like the sand of the sea, which can neither be measured or counted" (Hosea 2:1). So why count?

At the outset of his career as a journalist, Walter Cronkite worked as a copy editor for the Houston Chronicle. His boss, city editor Roy Rousell, was a stickler for detail and accuracy, who would raise a ruckus for the slightest error or inaccuracy. There was a price to pay if a Mr. Smythe was spelled as Mr. Smith.

Cronkite was responsible for a two-line item carried every day on the front page of the final edition, "Bank Clearings." Each day a small line simply read, "Today's Houston bank clearings were," followed by a large monetary figure.

One day Rousell called him into his office. He was clearly enraged. "You had the bank clearings all wrong yesterday," he snarled. His jaw was clenched. Cronkite had the clearings at \$3,726,359.27, the correct amount was \$3,726,359.17. He was off by ten cents, but the city editor was adamant, and visibly distraught.

"Such a stern reaction to a ten-cent mistake on a multi-million dollar figure?" thought Cronkite. Perhaps this outrage meant that this line of work was truly not for him.

When the young Cronkite walked back toward his colleagues, they looked grim. "How you're gonna fix this one?" they jeered. "So, are you getting bodyguards?" they taunted. Cronkite was baffled and finally exploded.

"What's all this fuss about a ten-cent error on a 3 million dollar clearing!?" He exclaimed. "What's the big deal?"

The other reporters looked at him in shock when then realized he truly did not understand the severity of his trivial mistake, their shock turned to pity.

Finally, the local columnist explained. "Do you think anybody really cares about the bank clearings? The numbers racket in Houston pays off using the last 5 digits of the bank clearing. Well, yesterday they paid off based on your number." He paused. "The mob don't like paying off on a bad number."

For the next few weeks, Walter Cronkite lived in literal fear of his seemingly insignificant ten cent error.

Numbers, no matter how irrelevant they seem to the unenlightened, are not meaningless. To us in a modern society we may read that Yehuda had 74,600 males over twenty and Naftali 53,400. But they are not mere numbers. Rav Naftoli of Ropshitz comments that each Jew mentioned brought immense spiritual greatness to this earth. Each person counted was a cherished gem whose existence impacted eternally. We often cite numbers and statistics without realizing the tremendous impact of their importance. We teach our children the significance of the destruction of European Jewry, but can they fathom the significance of 6,000,000 Jews lost? Does a Jew harmed in a terrorist attack or an Israeli soldier killed become a statistic, or is he mourned as a soul who graced this world with tremendous significance?

The Torah's reiteration of the importance of counting each and every member of our nation remains with us to this very day. We do not have to be counted for any socio-economic reason. We are counted for the inherent value of each and every soul. And ultimately each soul can alter the course of our history. Because each and every Jew's two cent's worth is worth more than millions. © 1999 Rabbi M. Kamenetzky & torah.org

